

Maldives president ends state of emergency

Rohantha De Silva
7 April 2018

Maldives President Abdul Yameen ended the country's state of emergency on March 22, after it was in force for 45 days, but is continuing his repression of political rivals. He withdrew the draconian emergency law a day after the police filed trumped-up terrorism charges against his chief opponents.

Those charged include former leader Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, jailed Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed and Justice Ali Hameed, four opposition lawmakers and an ex-police commissioner. Another opposition lawmaker, Abdulla Sinan, who had been arrested earlier, was detained on April 1, also on terrorism charges.

If convicted, the nine people charged with terrorism could be jailed for 10 to 15 years. In addition, two judges and a judicial officer were charged with receiving bribes to help overthrow the government.

A statement issued by Yameen's office noted that "though there still exists a diminished threat to national security," the president has decided to lift the state of emergency "in an effort to promote normalcy." In reality, Yameen lifted the emergency not to "promote normalcy" but because, having cracked down on his opponents, he is seeking to deflect international criticism.

The US, EU and India demanded the lifting of the emergency, not out of any concern for democratic rights. Rather they are hostile to Yameen's close ties with China, which cut across efforts to undermine Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean.

The present crisis erupted when the Maldives Supreme Court quashed the conviction of opposition leader and former President Mohamed Nasheed and ordered the immediate release of the eight other political figures on February 1. The court's decision threatened Yameen's parliamentary majority and would have allowed his rival Nasheed, currently in exile, to contest presidential elections due later this year.

To counter the court order, Yameen declared a state of emergency, arrested two Supreme Court judges and opposition leaders, then cracked down on opposition protests. Under pressure, the remaining Supreme Court judges reversed the February 1 decision.

Despite opposition from India, the Yameen government is strengthening its relations with China, which include major Chinese projects. The Maldivian ambassador in Beijing, Mohamed Faisal, told the *South China Morning Post* on March 22 this is part of a "global trend." He continued: "A lot of people are seeing what China is doing because in terms of both economically and global power, China is rising."

Chinese investment includes an airport expansion, a bridge connecting the airport to the capital Male, social housing and island resorts. Up to 2011, China had no embassy in Maldives. Since Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit in 2014, however, ties have rapidly developed. Chinese lending now accounts for more than 70 percent of the country's foreign debt. Yameen has signed up to China's One Belt, One Road infrastructure plan to integrate Eurasia, to which India and US are hostile.

India "welcomed" Yameen's decision to end the state of emergency. At the same time, India's external affairs ministry statement called for the "credible restoration of the political process as well as rule of law before elections are announced this year."

When the crisis erupted in Maldives, Nasheed called for Indian military intervention, claiming Yameen was transforming the island into a "Chinese colony." The Indian media repeatedly called on New Delhi to decisively intervene, warning that China was taking control of India's backyard. As well as demanding an end to emergency rule, New Delhi made known that its armed forces were ready for any eventuality.

Over the past two months, however, India has been cautious, due to threats elsewhere. Last year, India and

China were locked in a dangerous stand-off in their border areas on the Doklam Plateau. Despite boasting that it had stared down Beijing, New Delhi was clearly rattled by how close it came to an armed clash with China.

The *Indian Express* last week quoted an unnamed “senior government official” as saying: “We can’t stop what the Chinese are doing, whether in the Maldives or in Nepal, but we can tell them about our sensitivities, our lines of legitimacy. If they cross it, the violation of this strategic trust will be upon Beijing.”

For its part, China has bluntly stated that the political crisis in Maldives is an “internal matter” and “outside powers,” mainly India, should not get involved. In February, the Chinese navy conducted a naval exercise in the East Indian Ocean, which the Indian media immediately declared was a warning to New Delhi.

The *Hindu* wrote in its editorial on March 26 that “military intervention by India [in Maldives] was never a possibility” and called for a more cautious effort to influence the Yameen government. It urged New Delhi “to demonstrate its relevance to the Maldives as the biggest power in the South Asian region, while helping steer Mr. Yameen to a more reasonable and inclusive democratic course ahead of the presidential election later this year.”

None of this means India is retreating from its anti-China partnership with Washington and key US allies, Japan and Australia. The *PTI* reported on March 17 that the so-called quadrilateral alliance of India, US, Japan and Australia is going to discuss the Maldives issue at their next meeting. It quoted a senior US official as saying that Washington was closely monitoring the Chinese actions in the Indo-Pacific region and Maldives.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact